

At the same time the use of chemical fertilisers and the improvement of the drainage system raised the average yield per feddan. Between 1932 and 1939 the yield of all crops showed a distinct tendency to rise, only to fall again sharply in 1941, after imports of fertilisers had been drastically cut down.

Again, although the area actually cultivated averaged only 5,353,500 feddans between 1930 and 1940, there are in all 7,100,000 feddans which are classed as cultivable. The surplus of 1,750,000 feddans consists largely, no doubt, of inferior land, but if energetic measures were taken a great deal of it could be worked economically. Even should the limit be reached there still remains the Sudan. This vast and under-populated country is really an extension of Upper Egypt, which it resembles.

If present trends continue, however, these favourable factors are likely soon to be neutralised by the constant increase of the fellah population. Although the birthrate shows a tendency to fall, the gross rate of increase rose from an average of 168,000 a year between 1927 and 1937 to about 250,000 a year between 1937 and 1941.

Year	Population	Increase	Percentage Increase	Mean Annual Percentage Increase
1897	9,714,525	2,910,504	—	—
1907	11,287,359	1,572,834	16.2	1.62
1917	12,750,918	1,463,559	13.0	1.3
1927	14,217,864	1,466,946	11.5	1.25
1937	15,932,694	1,714,830	12.1	1.21

It is clear that sooner or later, if the present standard of living of the fellaheen is to be maintained, let alone raised, the problem of over-population will become acute. The pal- liatives we have mentioned will not suffice for long. More drastic measures will have to be taken: on the one hand the industrialisation of the country, to create a better balance between industry and agriculture and to raise the general level of production; and on the other hand a policy of re-allotment of land, permitting more intensive cultivation by smallholders, and better distribution of the products. The consideration of such remedies, however, lies beyond the scope of this book.

of Egypt in 1937 there were 7,947,193 men to 7,957,332/62 women. As nearly everyone marries, the inference is obvious. It may be, too, that Moslem customs have been counteracted to some extent by natural law and by Christian influence as represented in the Coptic family. In any case, years of work and suffering together, children, and a wife's good care create an almost unbreakable bond.

The temperament of the fellaheen, especially of the women, is very ardent and sensual. Marriage is to them less an affair of love than one of sexual attraction and reproduction.

The fellah's wife usually enjoys better health than her husband, who is weakened by bilharzia. She is younger and despite Islam has had considerable freedom in her own affairs since the most ancient times. Village tradition requires on pain of death that she should be physically a virgin when she marries, but mentally she has ceased to be so long before. Since childhood she has been aware of her parents' intercourse, which is quite open owing to lack either of privacy or of modesty. The conversation of the women, even before young girls, turns often on these subjects, not perhaps viciously, but certainly without restraint. They tell each other of the charms and stratagems with which to please and hold their menfolk.

The men, who are more reserved and by their way of life utterly materialistic; understand only sexual love. They revel in it, each with his own wife, and are kept faithful by virtue than by village law. Adultery leads immediately to bloodshed, and prostitutes are beyond their means.

The heat of passion is short-lived. At thirty a fellah woman is no longer attractive, but the children she has borne her husband bind him to her. Both want children above everything else. To the wife they mean social prestige, for barrenness is a disgrace and the chief cause of polygamy and divorce (**). To the father they represent helpers and successors, who will allow him to rest and give orders. Accordingly families are large. The average number of children is five, and this presupposes eight to ten births. The older they grow the more important does the mother become.

Another thing that binds the man to his wife is her wisdom and authority, which are often greater than his. A fellah proverb has it that 'Man is a river, woman a dyke'.

This mental defect, which is maintained by lack of education, is the cause of his improvidence. The whole year through he will deny himself even necessities; then the Feast comes, and he spends everything. His whole family enjoys two or three days of excitement — new clothes, rich food, sight-seeing. Then he goes back to his old life poorer than ever.

Suppose he has a few pounds in hand, which he has earned or borrowed, and his field needs attention. Does he buy tools or good manure to increase its yield? No, he will run further into debt to purchase the adjoining lot, to own a little more, to seem less of a smallholder. And when the time comes to repay? Sufficient unto the day...

The housewife never trims her lamp until it is already dark. The ploughman never greases his plough until he begins work. He pays his debts when he is forced to, buys seed on the eve of sowing, sends for the doctor when there is no more hope. He is improvidence incarnate.

Maqrizi, writing in the fourteenth century, notes this shortsightedness. "One side of the Egyptian character is never to take thought for the future. The Egyptians never store up provisions like the inhabitants of other lands. Another of their characteristics is the absence of reflection. My friend Sheikh Ibn Khaldoun used to say: 'The Egyptians act as if no day of reckoning would ever come'."

It is a fact that they neither think nor act except as the occasion demands, according to the pressure felt at the actual moment. Their reaction is determined by immediate sensation. This is why they are at the same time trustful and mistrustful, individualistic and gregarious, miserly and thriftless, patient and fiery-tempered.

They show a trust amounting to credulity in sacred things or persons able, as they think, to fulfil their desire for children, revenge or health. Their innumerable superstitions, the prestige enjoyed by ministers of the cult, and the success of pious-seeming impostors are all signs of this unbelievable credulity.

At the same time they habitually mistrust one another, even within the same family. Their master they mistrust even when he does well by them. They are like children too often deceived and stunted, who suspect everybody of being jealous of the little they have. This is the root of their belief in the Evil Eye.

Today only 25% of the population, that is to say the 271 inhabitants of the towns, drink pure water. A few new 312 waterworks are established from time to time. In 1940 the whole *mudiriya* of the Fayûm, the furthest from the Nile, was fitted up with a model installation. But the fellaheen are still slow to make use of these benefits. For example at Nekhêla, a big village of 20,000 souls near Abu Tig, a drinking-water supply was recently introduced by the progressive local Council. The women have to pay one millieme to fill a petrol tin or *ballas* at the public tap. But they prefer to use the river-water, which is abundant and free of charge. *Ghaffirs* have had to be posted to prevent them from doing so and to force them to profit by the progress they scorn.

The creation of model villages has been more tempting 361 to Governments. Mohammed Aly over a century ago 185 established a dozen places on a rectilinear plan to serve as 654 examples for others. Unfortunately the example of the unplanned villages was stronger, and today these places are scarcely distinguishable from the rest.

In 1914 the Khedive Abbas II inaugurated three rectilinear villages, each containing 180 houses, 169 of which were for the fellaheen and the rest for public services. Each dwelling consisted of two rooms and a yard. This experiment also failed, as the tenants modified the houses to suit their needs.

Nevertheless, after a twenty years' interval opinion is again turning to model villages. At the desire of the late King Fuad the farms on the Royal Domains have built for the labourers working on them symmetrical rows of houses with only a ground floor. They look like prisons to us, but to the fellaheen they are palaces.

Similar constructions have been planned or copied by a fair number of landowners, who have built cell-like dwellings of red or unbaked bricks for the fellaheen on their *'ezbas*.

The most interesting achievement, however, is that of the *'ezba* of Bahteem, belonging to the Royal Agricultural Society. The first part, finished in 1934, comprises thirty houses for workers and three for officials, together with public buildings. The dwellings run from north to south in five rows, and each row is divided into two groups by a street, widening into a square in the middle. Between each pair of

361

● 185

654

rows there is a street six yards wide, so that sunlight can penetrate into every dwelling.

● 361

185

654

342

The houses are of red brick, with concrete ceilings, and the floors inside are raised a foot above street level. The roof is about thirteen feet from the ground. Twenty of the houses are two-roomed, with a yard inside and a shed for cattle. Ten larger houses have three rooms, with a hall and outhouses. These are occupied by two families each, usually those of a father and his son.

[252

515]

Six baking-ovens have been built outside the housing-area, so that the smoke may not trouble the inhabitants. They are used by all the families in turn. There are also six shower-baths, four for men and two for women, together with laundry facilities.

[346]

[347]

The village hall will hold seventy people; it is used for feasts, marriages and funerals. The mosque covers about 600 square feet. The school, which follows the syllabus for compulsory elementary education, is open to boys and girls. Shops have been opened in order that the people may buy what they want on the spot, and there is a great enclosure with six depots for storing the various crops, fodder for the animals, and agricultural implements.

[312]

Water to fill the tanks is drawn from a well by a pumping machine. But this was an expensive experiment, costing L.E. 10,000, and could not be copied by private persons. Something more economical had to be found, which without sacrificing public health would be better adapted to the habits of the fellaheen. In 1935 the Royal Agricultural Society laid a new experiment before the landowners. Twenty houses of different kinds were built in blocks of four, separated by twenty-foot roads. Here the walls are of unbaked brick, and the roof of wood. There are two rooms about fifteen feet by twelve, a small yard, and an inside oven. Each dwelling costs L.E. 25 as against the L.E. 125 of the first plan.

654

341

361

The Government, for its part, has decided to build a model village in each *mudiriya*, beginning with the rebuilding of Mit Fares in Lower Egypt, which was destroyed by fire. The plan allows for houses of one or two stories with drinking-water and interior drainage; wide streets lined with trees; in the centre a mosque, a school, and a hall for meetings; and on the outskirts a market-place for the

The first and most urgent need, let it be said again, is ¹⁸³ education.

"It is my opinion that every reform which is not found-¹⁸⁵ ed on the education of the people is destined to fail, or at least²⁰³ to take a very long time—and the people's time is precious.

"Nothing will ever come of building model villages, or of using the cinema and the wireless to give advice on health and social matters, unless the people are educated and enabled to make use of all these things." (Article in Al-Mussawar No. 800 by 'Abdel-Qader Hamza Pasha, Senator, 1940.)

Many influential people, however, sincerely believe¹⁸³ that to educate the fellah would be to make him unhappy,¹⁸⁵ and that his present state of insensibility and habituation⁸⁷¹ is best for him. He does not suffer so much as one might think, for he does not know what he lacks. To teach him would mean to waken in him demands for comfort and amusement which he could not satisfy, and which would give him a distaste for work on the land. Then what would become of Egypt? In 1933 a Member of Parliament maintained that the education of the masses was undesirable, and suicidal for Egypt. Many large landowners think the same.

This may well be so, if by education is meant the wholly unsuitable programme to be found in the official syllabus of compulsory education. There is no sense in teaching the fellah practices which are useless in the country-side, and are based on purely Western ideas. "This teaching does not give results in proportion to its cost. The Commission therefore advises a radical reorganisation based on a recognition of the need to prepare the young for country life, so as to raise the standard of agricultural production" ("). As for the fellah's distaste for the farm's driving him to the¹⁶⁶ city, this movement comes more from continual poverty than from such teaching. The fellah migrates to the town only because he hopes to earn enough there to enable him to return to the land.

It must be said that no depopulation of the countryside¹⁶² has yet been noted. The 1937 census shows a stationary¹⁶⁶ figure for the rural population, in spite of the increased birth rate and the relative decrease of mortality. On the other¹⁸⁴ hand, in the less illiterate villages, and among fellahs who have returned after a long stay in the city — poorer

CONCLUSION

THE DISTRESS OF THE FELLAH

In comparison with the fellah's miserable lot a century ¹⁷⁸ ago or under the Mamelukes, his present situation is an un-⁵¹¹ doubted improvement. He can no longer be killed like a ⁷³⁵ dog, plundered at will, or commandeered as a slave.

In comparison with the woes of the negro, Malagasy, ^[171] Chinese, or Tonkinese peasant, the fellah might seem even more fortunate. He is undernourished but does not die of hunger. He has clothes to wear, and, when holidays come round, money to spend on amusements.

True, but there are two kinds of poverty. There is ⁷³⁵ physical poverty, which means insufficiency of resources ¹⁸⁵ and a lack of the conditions necessary for the maintenance and development of physical health; and there is intellectual and moral poverty, which means ignorance and a lack of human dignity, no less essential to the life of the spirit.

Physical poverty has a more immediate effect on the worker and, precisely because it is more noticeable, arouses more pity. Hence all these efforts to improve the fellah's house, his health, and his finances. Hence also the habitual tone of his complaints, and of the speeches made about him. "This is no new question, but a subject that has figured in every Speech from the Throne since the beginnings of our parliament. We are not suffering from a diversity of evils, each of which can be treated separately, but from a single fundamental evil, and that is the low standard of life of the masses of the people in the countryside; a standard so low that it offends all human feelings, and stains the reputation of our country. The people of Egypt is not composed of those 160 or 200 thousand persons who are comparatively well off, but of sixteen million souls" (").

In this low standard of living we must also include moral ⁵¹¹ poverty, which since it affects the very sources of human life ⁷³⁵

F
747 to be humane. This is shown by a growing number of articles in the Egyptian Press, as well as by, for instance, a recent film-production entitled *Asifa 'ala-l-Rif* (Storm over the Village), which deals courageously with the problem of the fellah and his masters.

E
F
565
747 It is none the less clear that the educated classes have neglected their responsibilities. They have turned away from the masses and devoted themselves to politics, literature, or European travel. They have been self-centred or, as some would say, unpatriotic enough to keep their culture and their wealth strictly to themselves. It is true that every now and again from their ivory tower they have commended enthusiastically the earthy qualities of the fellah, but they have never done much to help him. The occasional meetings of the governing classes with the fellaheen have something theatrical about them, and what is theatrical is obviously not real.

E
F
747
184 A member said lately in the Chamber "In this country, when a Prime Minister visits a village, he is accompanied by an escort of some three hundred soldiers, not to mention officers and high officials. Under such conditions he cannot get into touch with the people of the place or find out what they really need" (**). The honourable member went on to suggest that ministers should find out for themselves the true state of the people.

F
183
185
748 Thus the fellah, like a neglected child who grows up without thinking or learning anything, has remained rooted to the ground. The earth has stopped him from sinking yet lower; it has preserved and sustained him, but it could not elevate him. The essential need of the fellaheen is to be awakened and revived to their heritage of humanity.

This is the task of the upper classes, and especially of those who are most concerned with the land: landowners, agricultural engineers, and all who live in the country or visit it in the course of their work, such as merchants, bank-employees, and Government officials. These people should no longer confine themselves to economic administration or political relations with the fellaheen, but should also make an effort to create disinterested human contacts. This is the only way to do any good. It is noticeable how much encouragement the fellaheen derive from the simplest of visits to our village schools by notables or townspeople,

provided these show real cordiality and interest and have¹⁸³
come to see the fellaheen for their own sake. ¹⁸⁵

The same task belongs, by virtue of their very function, ⁷⁴⁸
to teachers and ministers of religion, who enter more deeply
into the life of the village. Whoever assists them in their
work shows the most intelligent form of patriotism.

The wives and daughters of landowners are also specially
called to this task. One young girl of good family who spends
her holidays in the country and is sensitive to the people's
needs has been able quite alone to gather all the fellaheen
of the 'ezba and, by telling them stories every evening, to ^[538]
educate them and generally raise their standards. This is
true feminism at work.

The essential problem, then, is to undertake and carry
through a task of education and enlightenment, which is more
a matter of personal understanding and personal service
than of committees, speeches and official decrees.

The only thing that can awaken without exciting, help
without weakening, free without uprooting the fellaheen is
a socially-minded and altruistic spirit in the upper classes.
It is from above that a beginning must be made.

There could be no fitter conclusion to this book than a
quotation from the great Pope Pius XI (¹¹):

"Your duty is to afford the worker both material and ⁽²⁾
spiritual help : material help, by so acting that not only
legal justice may work on his behalf, but also social justice;
that is to say, that he may benefit from all those institu-
tions that have as their aim the betterment of the condi-
tions of the working classes : spiritual help, by giving them
the aid of religion, without which they will live immersed
in a brutalising and degrading materialism There are
millions of human beings living in conditions so pitiful and
so wretched that they do not even enjoy the minimum of
well-being necessary for the preservation of human dignity."

[page 160 is blank]